

## Auxiliaries & Passive and Active Voice

### II. Passive and Active Voice

#### 1. Definition of the Passive Voice

**Passive voice** is a grammatical construction in which *the subject* of a sentence is the *receiver of the action*, rather than *the doer of the action*. We use the passive voice when:

- We do not know **who did the action** (the doer/the subject).
- When the **object** is more important than the **subject**.

#### Examples:

- The meal was prepared.
- The meal was prepared by the chef.

#### Explanation:

In the first sentence, the meal is the receiver of the action, and the sentence does not explicitly mention who prepared it. The emphasis is on the fact that the meal was prepared, but it does not specify by whom.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, the second sentence includes the agent (**the person or thing performing the action**). In this case, the chef is mentioned as the one who prepared the meal. Including the *agent* in a passive voice sentence is optional, but it can be useful when you want to specify who performed the action. This sentence provides more information than the first one by identifying the chef as the one responsible for preparing the meal.<sup>2</sup>

To sum up, both sentences convey the idea that the meal was prepared, but the second sentence provides additional information by specifying that *“the chef”* was the one who performed the action. The choice between these constructions depends on the context and the level of detail you want to include in your statement.

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<sup>1</sup> Explanation of the first example

<sup>2</sup> Explanation of the second example

### 1.1. Situations where to use Passive Voice

Passive voice can be useful in certain situations. Here are some examples of sentences in passive voice:

#### a) **Emphasis on the action or recipient:**

If you want to emphasize what happened rather than who did it, here the passive voice can be useful.

*Example: "The Mona Lisa was painted by Leonardo da Vinci".*

=> In here the focus is on the "painting" rather than who draw the "painting".

#### b) **Unknown or unimportant doer:**

When the doer of the action is unknown or unimportant, passive voice can be used.

*Example: "The documents were misplaced".*

=> In this example we don't know who misplaced these documents, the agent is unknown.

#### c) **Formal or scientific writing:**

In certain types of formal or scientific writing, passive voice is preferred.

*Example: "The experiment was conducted to test the hypothesis".*

=> Because it is focusing on something related to scientific discourse, we used passive voice in this sentence.

#### d) **When it is obvious who/what is performing the action:**

*Example: "Hailey was robbed last week".*

=> In here it is pretty obvious who performed the action of robbing (**thief**).

#### e) **To describe factual information, especially when describing a process:**

*Example: "The lasagna is baked in an oven for 35 minutes at 250 degrees Celsius".*

=> This sentence we used the passive voice to explain the process of cooking "**Lasagna**".

**f) To report news:**

***Example: Five people were arrested in downtown last night.***

=> This sentence is in passive voice and describes an event where five people were arrested in downtown.

**2. Definition of the Active Voice**

**Active voice** is a grammatical construction in which *the subject* of a sentence *performs the action* expressed by *the verb*. It is generally considered more direct and clear than passive voice, which is a construction where the subject *receives the action*. We use the active voice when:

- We want to **focus** on the **doer of the action**.

**Examples:**

- The earthquake destroyed the town last night. (Active)
- The town was destroyed last night. (Passive)

**Explanation:**

In the active voice sentence, the subject (*the earthquake*) performs the action of destroying, and the object (*the town*) receives the action. This sentence emphasizes on the doer of the action. However, in the passive voice sentence, the emphasis shifts from *the doer* of the action to the receiver of the action. The town is the entity that experienced the destruction without necessarily specifying who or what caused it.

**2.1. Situations where to use Active Voice**

Here are some situations where to use active voice in sentences:

**a) Clarity:**

Active voice tends to be more straightforward and easier to understand. It clearly indicates who is performing the action.

**b) Directness:**

Active voice is more concise and gets to the point quickly. It is often more engaging for

readers.

**c) Emphasis on the Doer:**

When the emphasis or focus is on the person or entity performing the action, active voice is more appropriate.

**d) Everyday Writing:**

In most everyday writing, such as emails, reports, articles, and general communication, active voice is preferred for its simplicity and effectiveness.

**e) Narrative Writing:**

In storytelling and narrative writing, active voice is often used to create a sense of immediacy and connection with the characters and events.

**f) Instructions:**

When giving instructions or describing processes, active voice is usually clearer and more direct than the passive voice.

**g) Scientific and Technical Writing:**

In scientific and technical writing, active voice is commonly used to clearly attribute actions to specific researchers or elements.

**h) Formal Writing:**

In formal writing, such as academic papers or business documents, active voice is generally preferred for its clarity and professionalism.

### Important Notes:

1. In the passive voice we put the auxiliary “*to be*” in the same tense of the given verb + *past participle of the given verb*.
2. We add “*by*” before the agent (most of the time).
3. The *agent (the doer)* sometimes is not mentioned.
4. When the subject is: **people, someone, somebody**.... We do not mention it in the passive voice, For instance:
  - **Somebody broke the window. (Active)**
  - **The window was broken. (Passive)**
5. In active voice, the *subject* comes first, followed by *the verb* and then the *object*. This structure typically creates more concise and straightforward sentences.
6. In passive voice, the object comes first, followed by auxiliary “*to be*” with the *past participle of the main verb* in the active voice and then the *agent* which is optional (you can either mention or not).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Structure of Active & Passive Voice